

COUNSELING INTERVENTIONS FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN PENAL INSTITUTIONS

Stavros Kiriakidis

University of Thessaly

The present study focuses on the counseling interventions for adolescents and young people held in custody. The study analyses the social effects of imprisonment, the incapacitation effects of custody, the need for delivering counseling in custody. In addition it reviews evidence regarding the effects of delivering counseling interventions in custody on reduction of recidivism, what type of intervention is more effective and what would be ways to improve the effectiveness of counseling interventions in custody. Finally, it proposes, based on the available evidence, that correctional treatment, in general, could fruitfully focus on the proximal criminogenic needs of youngsters held in custody so as reduction of general recidivism rates can be achieved.

Social Effects of Imprisonment

It could be argued that the imprisonment of young offenders could be seen as a measure with at least two effects. Deterrence effects on the general population, meaning that the population perceives that someone who commits a crime is punished for the action and effects of incapacitation on the reduction of the overall level of criminal activity, in the sense that by removing those youngsters who commit offences from the community, they do not have any opportunities to continue their offending behaviour in the community (Rutter et al., 1998). The evidence suggesting that increasing punishment in terms of severity of consequences and/or the number of people punished in terms of deterrent effects on the general population is inconclusive (Rutter et al., 1998) the incapacitation effects of custody for reducing the overall level of criminal activity has been examined by Tarling (1993).

Incapacitation Effects of Custody

Tarling (1993) showed that for England and Wales and for the years 1975, 1980 and 1986 the level of criminal activity must have been reduced between 6% and 9% according to the levels of imprisonment, a finding suggesting that current levels of incapacitation through custody do not reduce criminal activity dramatically. Tarling (1993) argued that a small number of offenders are given custodial sentences and most of these sentences are too short to prevent juvenile and young offenders from continuing their criminal careers, especially when they are released and they are at an age around the peak of offending. Tarling (1993) argued that if the criminal activity is to be reduced either the number of offenders receiving custodial sentences should be increased and/or the length of the sentencing should be increased with both alternatives resulting in an increase in the prison population and the costs related with that, and further analyzed the data from England and Wales for 1975, 1980 and 1986 and found that for a decrease of 1% in the overall crime level an increase of 16% to 20% in the prison population would be required.

Overall it could be concluded that incapacitation per se does not have a dramatic influence on the levels of criminal activity in society and that reliance on custodial sentences only, with an aim of either deterrent effect on the general population or as punishment for those youngsters who offend to make them refrain from further offending is insufficient, since statistics from England and Wales showed that almost 90% of juveniles aged 14 to 16 held in custody were reconvicted within a period of two years after release from custody (Tarling, 1993).

Need for Counseling Interventions in Custody

From that perspective, Andrews et al., (1990: 369) argued that *neither criminal sanctioning without provision of rehabilitative service nor servicing without reference to clinical principles of rehabilitation will succeed in reducing recidivism*. It has become rather clear that custodial sentences alone are not sufficient measures for the reduction of future criminal activity of the inmates, while there is some evidence suggesting that these institutions which provide opportunities for personal development, have more effect on future rates of recidivism (Hedderman and Sugg, 1997; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998).

Counseling Intervention in Custody and Reduction of Recidivism

Lipsey and Wilson (1998) addressed the questions of whether intervention with juveniles and young offenders in institutionalised settings produced any significant effects in reducing re-offending rates after release from the institutions and if so, which programmes were found the most effective through a meta-analytic study. It was found that groups of young offenders who have received some kind of intervention within the correctional settings had a rate of re-offending reduced by an average of 15% in comparison to control groups who received no intervention. Similar results have been reported by Andrews et al., (1990) who found that the delivery of treatment can cut recidivism rates even more dramatically by about 50%, when delivered appropriately, that is, when it focuses on high risk individuals, criminogenic needs and there is a matching of the learning style of the offenders and the treatment. In general, there seems to be little disagreement with the proposition that delivery of treatment within the correctional settings has significant and beneficial effects in terms of future recidivism rates for adolescent and young offenders (Lipsey, 1995; Lösel, 1995; Sheldrick, 1994; Mulvey, Arthur and Reppucci, 1993; Izzo and Ross, 1990).

Type of Counseling Interventions That Has Proved More Effective

The next question that could be asked, is what type of intervention is the most promising in reducing the general recidivism rate for institutionalised youngsters after release. This question was further examined by Lipsey and Wilson (1998), and they concluded that a clear answer is not yet available. Interpersonal skills training and family education were found to be the two interventions that showed the larger statistically significant effect sizes while multiple services and community residential programs showed statistically significant results, yet, with high heterogeneity across studies, suggesting inconsistent effects across studies. Izzo and Ross (1990) in another meta-analysis attempting to estimate the effectiveness of different types of interventions in reducing recidivism in institutionalised juvenile offenders found that these studies including a cognitive component were the most efficient in that respect and they attributed the superiority of cognitive interventions to changes in the youngsters thinking. Interventions were classified as cognitive if they included one of the following components: problem solving, negotiation skills training, interpersonal skills training, rational-emotive therapy, role-playing and modelling or cognitive behavioural modification.

Rutter et al., (1998) argued that the results of meta-analyses on the effectiveness of interventions within correctional institutions can be very informative as they summarise the overall effects of individual studies, thus allowing the detection of real benefits whether large or small, and that it provides a way of pitting different kinds of interventions one against the other and detect the ones that produce the most substantial benefits. However, the results of the meta-analysis should be evaluated with some caution especially when the issue of the most effective interventions is to be inferred as not every kind of possible intervention has been implemented in the correctional system. In addition, there is a high degree of heterogeneity of both the components of the treatments delivered and the groups of youngsters who participated in the interventions, that has not been originally assessed in the individual studies which makes it impossible to take account of these factors statistically in the meta-analysis and assess the degree to which they might be sources of variation in the overall effectiveness of the treatments. Finally most of the studies do not provide any information on either dose response relations, whether any beneficial changes were related to the degree of the intervention, whether intensity, frequency or duration, nor on the mediating variables responsible for change. The last requirement would be extremely helpful for both practical and theoretical reasons, by assessing the extent to which any changes produced are really brought about by the factors hypothesised by the interventions' theoretical rationale.

Despite these caveats in the implementation and evaluation of psychological treatments in the correctional settings for juveniles and young offenders (Andrews et al., 1990; Andrews, 1995; Gendreau and Andrews,

1990; Lipsey and Wilson 1998), the results of the meta-analytic studies are informative in that at least any kind of intervention is better than nothing, and that programs based on cognitive-behavioural principles have produced the most effective results in terms of reduction of future re-offending rates among juvenile and young offenders held in custody (Izzo and Ross, 1990; Andrews et al., 1990; Sheldrick, 1994).

Ways to Improve the Effectiveness of Counseling Interventions in Custody

Furthermore, Rutter et al., (1998) noted that in general the results of the interventions were more promising when, they targeted criminogenic factors, the methods used were active and focused on problem solving, interventions were matched according to the risk of the individuals, higher risk youngsters were treated more intensively and for longer periods and the actual implementation of the intervention was the one originally intended, that is interventions with high integrity. Similar conclusions were reached by Binder (1988) who argued that there is a need for more adequate research designs combined with interventions of high integrity, examining the components of treatments delivered, that is both the informal interactions between staff and clients and the formal aspects of the interventions delivered, before any definite conclusions can be made on the effectiveness of interventions delivered within the correctional institutions.

The Necessity to Focus on Proximal Criminogenic Needs

Research, addressing issues of juvenile delinquency in general and recidivism and chronic offending in particular, has concentrated on risk and protective factors related with antisocial behaviour in an attempt to identify causes for continuing juvenile delinquency with a reluctance to address issues of the reasons and the motives that might be related with juvenile delinquency (Rutter et al., 1997; Lynam, 1996). Farrington (1993) provided several reasons for that lack of research in the motivations of juvenile delinquents and noted the several difficulties inherent in such research. One reason is that the search for internal motives, such as instincts can result in tautological accounts of juvenile delinquency and behaviour in general as any different kind of behaviour can be attributed to an instinct, thus, theories relying on internal forces such as needs and drives, have little explanatory value (McCord, 1997).

Farrington (1993) argued that another difficulty in the study of internal motives, threatening the validity of the results, is the reliance on introspection and usually retrospective accounts of the reasons for behaviour with the objection being that people do not have access to complex mental processes and because retrospective accounts of past behaviour are likely to be influenced by, what Rutter et. al., (1998) called *halo* effects, that is, a tendency of people to provide accounts of past behaviour that is in line with their present mental state, an effect that confounds any *true* possible causes in the past with present subjective interpretations of the phenomenon of interest. This effect is most probable when the same agent is the source of information for any phenomenon that has been different in the past and has changed in the present. However, Farrington (1993) argued that while the risk/protective factors approach in juvenile delinquency and chronic offending has provided us with a number of risk factors related to and predictive of juvenile delinquency, the exact ways that these factors are translated into actual antisocial behaviour is not known. There is a host of variables identified, mostly static factors, that in general account for a moderate degree of variation in the prediction of juvenile delinquency, yet the exact way that the influence of these factors is translated into delinquent behaviour is not specified, there are no mechanisms or processes identified as mediating that influence, which means that, apart from relative predictive information that these mainly static factors could have for the study of juvenile delinquency, the specific nature of these relationships has not been described, identified and tested.

Vennard, Sugg and Hedderman (1997) similarly, proposed that any intervention delivered in correctional settings should concentrate on criminogenic needs, such as antisocial attitudes and drug misuse, as the factors that are more proximally related with the youngsters' propensity to re-offend. Most of the interventions delivered within the correctional settings are of a cognitive-behavioural nature, a term, that while it is not very specific in terms of the exact components of the intervention, which could vary, they can broadly be specified in terms of their aims, that is *to teach offenders to face up to what they have done, to understand their motives and to develop new coping strategies and ways of controlling their behaviour* (ibid: 6).

Conclusion

From this perspective, the points of the current paper are potentially informative for the content of cognitive-behavioural interventions, that is, the beliefs and attitudes that need to be challenged within the

correctional settings of Young Offenders Institutions. In addition, social cognition models are theoretical frameworks that provide a useful model of assessing the relevant needs of the offenders and the factors that the young offenders themselves think that are important and need to be changed in order to avoid future re-offending. It seems that the assessment of the subjectively perceived criminogenic factors is an important issue in the delivery of correctional treatment, not only because it is the subjective interpretation of factors involved in a decision to commit an antisocial act that is important (Rutter et al, 1997), but, at the same time, provides a means of assessing the criminogenic needs of individual offenders or homogeneous groups of young offenders, which could be different from individual to individual or for different groups, thus permitting a matching of the needs that are identified with the delivery of the programme. In addition, issues of self-regulation of moral behaviour and the perceived costs and benefits of future offending could be further examined in adult offenders, young and adult female offenders, to examine possible gender differences, and finally in different sub-populations of offenders, e.g. in violent and property offenders.

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